

Department of Human Services

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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips Monday, February 4, 2008

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RON DZWONKOWSKI

Target poverty

Aim for solutions, and other state problems will diminish

February 3, 2008



By RON DZWONKOWSKI

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

In the 11 pages of her State of the State speech, Gov. Jennifer Granholm mentioned tax or taxes a dozen times, anger or angry eight times, jobs 54 times, and "alternative energy" or "renewable energy" 25 times.

One word she didn't say was "poverty."

Advertisement

It's not a word people like to hear. Nobody wants to be associated with it. And even as skilled a speaker as Granholm would have lost her audience if she devoted her 55-minute address to the State of Poverty in Michigan.

But it is a staggering issue, affecting a third of the people of Michigan.

To be sure, much of what Granholm proposed in her 55-minute speech would combat poverty. But Ismael Ahmed, named by Granholm in August to head the state's major agency for helping the poor, thinks it's time we looked at the social equation the other way, too: How many problems could be reduced if we started by attacking poverty?

"I won't go anywhere, speak any place, without talking about poverty," Ahmed said in a conversation Monday, a day before the governor's speech. Ahmed is director of the state Department of Human Services, which in one way or another provides help to 1.8 million people in Michigan, about one in five state residents. But statistics show that the number who are mired in poverty -- "basically, they can't live on what they make," Ahmed said -- is more like one in three.

The governor and her DHS director are not so much on different pages here as Ahmed is zeroed in on one aspect of the myriad of Michigan problems confronting Granholm. But his is a big one that underlies many others. Poverty does need a high profile in Michigan, embarrassing as that might be.

In her speech, Granholm said, "Government cannot be all things to all people -- we have to focus on four things." Her list:

- A job for every Michigan worker.
- Affordable health care for every family.
- Safe places to live and work for all of us.
- Quality education for our citizens -- kids and adults.

Poverty figures in all of those. Unemployment causes it. Poor health care results from it. Crime is a byproduct of it, and

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=RON+DZWONKOWSKI%3A+Target+pov...> 2/4/2008

education is the best way to fight it.

"The role of government, and the role of our department, is to provide the best safety net we can for people, and to begin to develop a future for them," said Ahmed, 60, who can recall his own family being forced to go on public assistance several times during his childhood because of auto industry layoffs.

In his first few months as head of DHS, the former director of the ACCESS human services agency in Dearborn said he has felt nearly overwhelmed at times learning the extent of poverty in Michigan. Ahmed also said he's sure that many poor people are not even seeking help because they are ashamed, particularly those who have fallen from the middle class due to lost factory jobs or health care issues.

"The newly poor ... are the least capable of dealing with poverty," Ahmed said. "They have no history of it."

DHS is holding a series of meetings around the state on poverty that will build to a major summit this fall in Detroit. Ahmed isn't certain where that will lead, but he is sure that unless Michigan confronts its poverty head-on, economic recovery is impossible.

"There's your economic problem in Michigan," Ahmed said. "We're talking about a third of the people in this state. We have to raise the profile of poverty, show people what's at stake."

RON DZWONKOWSKI is editor of the *Free Press* editorial page. Contact him at dzwonk@freepress.com or 313-222-6635.

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There's absolutely no excuse for death of Fantasia Reese

EDITORIAL

The Oakland Press

The investigation into the death of 3-year-old Fantasia Reese and the related suspicions of child abuse raises more questions than answers.

Abuse allegations surfaced after Fantasia was placed in the critical care unit of William Beaumont Hospital on Jan. 13 and taken off life support Jan. 16.

Neglect petitions have been filed against Fantasia's mother, Sharon Hobson of Pontiac. Oakland County Family Court Referee David Bilson has ordered Hobson to have no contact with her remaining children until the case is resolved.

A hearing will be held to determine if there's sufficient evidence to terminate Hobson's parental rights to the three other children. The children have been placed in foster care or with family members.

Pontiac police continue to investigate Fantasia's death. No charges have been issued yet in connection with the death. However, Hobson's live-in boyfriend, Tommie Lee Croskey, 29, Pontiac, is being charged with third-degree child abuse against the 11-year-old brother of Fantasia Reese.

Reports have surfaced that social workers were called at least nine times about the welfare of the 3-year-old girl and her three siblings, according to Oakland County prosecutors.

Prosecutors say allegations of abuse by Fantasia Reese's mother were never brought to them by state investigators working for the Michigan Department of Human Services. They have said they couldn't proceed with a Jan. 23 hearing because DHS investigators didn't fax evidence to their office in time.

At one point, Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca even criticized Kim Thornton, the DHS investigator handling the case and also said the case was "...like ÔRicky Holland Two'," alluding to the 7-year-old Williamston boy whose adoptive parents were convicted of killing him. However, Gorcyca said the Fantasia Reese case shouldn't be a reflection on every caseworker at DHS. OK, let's not throw any more personal stones but let's take a look at some of the questions that have been raised. How many complaints does it take for the DHS to put a priority on it's investigation of a specific case? Apparently, nine complaints weren't enough. Does it take 10, 15 or 20? What types of "red flags" do investigators need before they delve more deeply in charges of child abuse? Why did the state seem to move so slowly in this case? We understand that DHS caseworkers have hundreds of complaints to

look into and not enough help to do it.

But the department needs to look at what it can do with its current resources to prevent other children like Fantasia from dying.

Maybe they have to redefine what a "top priority" case entails. Maybe they need to move more quickly when the number of complaints in a certain case begin to pile up.

Maybe DHS staffers need to work more closely with other departments, such as the police and the prosecutor.

Considering its resources, perhaps the DHS is doing the best it can. But the death of Fantasia indicates some changes may be in order. The DHS should at least look into what it can do differently.

No public official - either in the prosecutor's office, the DHS or public safety - should accept Fantasia's death as something that unavoidably happens every once in awhile.

That is just not acceptable.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/020408/opi_20080204182.shtml

Mother in case of autistic girl allowed to see son

February 4, 2008

By JOHN WISELY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A West Bloomfield mother charged with neglecting her autistic daughter can visit her son, who has been placed in foster care while the case proceeds, a judge ruled this morning.

District Judge Marc Barron agreed to modify the woman's bond to allow her a one-hour weekly visitation with the boy, now 13. The visits must be supervised by a court-appointed guardian and a social worker. The mother is also barred from discussing the case with the boy.

Advertisement

The woman's husband is charged with raping the couple's 14-year-old autistic daughter in a case involving facilitated communication, a controversial technique where non-verbal students type answers to questions into a keyboard with the assistance of a facilitator who guides their hands. Critics insist the facilitator is communicating.

The Free Press is not naming the couple to protect the identity of the girl. Both children have been removed from the home while the case proceeds.

Barron's ruling came after Family Court Judge Joan Young, who is hearing a separate request from prosecutors to terminate the parents' custody rights, agreed to the visitation.

"We have no objection to bond being modified to be in compliance with Judge Young's order," Assistant Prosecutor Paul Walton said.

The mother, whose travels were restricted by a court-ordered monitoring device, will also be allowed to attend religious services on Saturdays as part of the deal.

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Psychiatric exam to determine if sex assault suspect will stand trial

Man faces five counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

By Michael P. McConnell

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

FERNDALE - A man accused of sexually assaulting a Madison Heights girl he met online on MySpace.com has been ordered to undergo a psychiatric exam to determine whether he is competent to stand trial.

Douglass Wall, 26, is jailed in lieu of \$100,000 cash bond of five counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct. Each count is a 15-year felony.

Ferndale 43rd District Judge Joseph Longo ordered Wall to undergo the psychiatric exam at a hearing Thursday at the request of Wall's attorney, Amy Hopp.

Ferndale Police Lt. William Wilson said Friday that the girl, 15, has indicated to investigators she had sexual relations with other adult men.

"Police in Madison Heights and Hazel Park are also investigating cases with her as a sexual assault victim," Wilson said.

Wall was charged in the Ferndale case on Jan. 5.

Ferndale police said Wall routinely hosted parties for minors at his house where there was drinking and drug use.

The suspect was reported to police on New Year's Eve by a father who learned his children had been at Wall's house that night, police said.

The father's three children, ages 14 to 17, told him there was drinking going on at Wall's house, police reported.

Ferndale police then went to Wall's house on East Cambourne Street and confiscated drug paraphernalia and a small amount of marijuana, Wilson said.

"When you have an adult man regularly hosting parties for kids to drink and get it often suggests there is also a motive to have sex with minors," Wilson said.

The girl in the Ferndale case told police she met Wall online in October then had sex with him after 15th birthday in November.

Wall's case and the outcome of his psychiatric exam will be reviewed by the court on March 6 and a court hearing will be set after that, a court official said.

Contact Michael P. McConnell at mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com or at

<http://www.dailytribune.com/cgi-bin/printme.pl>

2/4/2008



Son considered in Dawson case

Saturday, February 02, 2008

SPARTA -- Timothy Dawson, accused in his wife Julia's 2004 killing, has asked a judge to relinquish parental rights to their 4-year-old son, Alexander. His new wife, Billie Dean, has filed for custody of the boy in a Kerr County, Texas, courtroom, a court official said. A hearing is scheduled for Feb. 7. After Dawson's arrest Jan. 25, Alex was turned over to protective services workers in Texas. His grandparents, Kevin and Tamara Keenan, of Ada Township, said they would seek custody of their daughter's son.

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Law keeps man from daughter

Posted by [Brad Flory | Jackson Citizen Patriot](#)

February 03, 2008 08:00AM

James Rodesiler carries outdated photographs of the daughter he lost.

The girl is alive and evidently doing well in Coldwater. But Rodesiler, an Addison resident who is postmaster of Hanover, was cut from her life when the baby was 2 months old. She is 3 years old now.

He learned the hard way that he has no legal rights as a parent because the girl's mother was married to another man when the baby was born.

"The fact that you've got a DNA test, the fact you've held your daughter in your arms, that fact you want to take care of her doesn't matter," Rodesiler said. "The state recognizes the marriage certificate."

Michigan law always presumes a husband is father of his wife's children, regardless of biological facts.

"That's been the law forever," said Kimberly Graham, a lawyer who handles paternity cases for the Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney office. "A child born to married people legally belongs to the husband."

Rules used in Michigan are "pretty much standard in other states," said Jim Semerad, who has studied paternity issues as political action chairman for DADS of Michigan, a nonprofit affiliate of the American Coalition for Fathers and Children.

Rodesiler calls the law obsolete in an era when DNA tests can easily and conclusively establish paternity. He is not alone in that view.

Michigan Sen. Michelle McManus, cqa Republican from Lake Leelanau, has twice introduced bills to give "putative fathers" like Rodesiler a legal mechanism to establish paternity in court.

"It's unfortunate that these kinds of situations are common," said McManus. "I've been working on it since 2003. I had a constituent in my area that had the same kind of problem."

Michigan appellate judges have seemingly suggested lawmakers ought to update the paternity law.

"We conclude that our job is not to rewrite the statute and we direct the plaintiff (father) to the Legislature for any relief that might be forthcoming," a three-judge panel said in a 2005 ruling.

McManus has discovered lawmakers are in no hurry to grant legal rights to "putative fathers."

Critics fear it could bring more harm than good to children and their families.

Her first bill died in committee and the second shows few signs of life in the Senate Committee on Families and Human Services.

"It's delicate when you get into situations like this," McManus said. "There are children who don't even know they have a (different) biological father."

One group opposed to the bill is Michigan NOW, the National Organization for Women.

"It could have a huge impact on dismantling intact families," said Renee Beeker, cqpresident of Michigan NOW.

"It's a relative stranger disrupting a family. Can you imagine a family with three children and all of a sudden one of them has to go off to somebody's house every other weekend?"

Semerad, whose group supports McManus' bill, said the "intact families" argument assumes children are best off not knowing the truth.

"We are denying these children their heritage and, in some cases, their inheritance," Semerad said.

"If the woman is committing adultery and having a baby, the marriage has basically gone into the ditch, anyway," he said.

Graham said the current law frequently complicates efforts to force biological fathers to pay child support in Jackson County.

Often, Graham said, women separate from but do not divorce their husbands, then have children by other men with no legal obligation to the baby.

"It's a huge issue," Graham said. "There are lots of cases like that in my office. I think it would be more than hundreds."

Husbands who are not biological fathers can "disestablish paternity" by mutual agreement of all parties, Graham said, but finding agreement is not always possible.

Mutual agreement has proven impossible in Rodesiler's case.

Rodesiler, now 51, was married and in the process of divorce when he began a relationship in 2004 with the woman who would become mother of his daughter.

The woman, 36, declined comment for this story.

Rodesiler said it was his understanding that the woman was also in the process of divorce.

Their baby was born early in 2005. At first, Rodesiler expected to be given parental rights by consent.

For a few weeks, the mother gave him parenting time. She went along with a DNA test that shows a 99.99999 percent certainty he is the father, he said.

Then the woman reconciled with her husband and asked Rodesiler to leave her and the baby alone.

"I have no standing, so I cannot even take it to court," he said.

The mother sought and was granted two personal protection orders to keep Rodesiler away, even though she told the judge she does not fear him.

"No violence, just annoyance," she wrote in her request for a protection order.

"I don't want him on my property, sitting in his vehicle across the street, calling me or sending mail," she wrote.

Asked in the court document if they have any children in common, the woman wrote: "Not according to Michigan law."

Rodesiler eventually remarried his wife. He has four grown sons and three stepchildren.

He thinks about his daughter daily, Rodesiler said, and feels cheated by a law that gives him no rights.

Someday, he expects, he will be allowed to see the girl again. He is hard-pressed to predict when or how it will happen.

"The fact the state allows one parent to take a child away from another parent, strictly for convenience, is legal kidnapping," he said.

NILES TWP.

Man takes own life during standoff with police

By H-P STAFF

February 4, 2008

NILES — A 47-year-old Niles Township man killed himself Sunday while state police tried to coax him into surrendering, the Niles post reported.

Troopers said the man, whose name was not released, died outside his house along Mould Drive.

Troopers had responded to a 5:10 a.m. report of domestic violence at the house. Upon arrival, troopers met with the assault victim at a neighbor's house. Troopers then made contact with the man on his doorstep.

After a brief conversation, the man held a gun to his head and threatened to kill himself. He then barricaded himself in his house. The post called in the state police Emergency Support Team and began negotiations.

After what the post reported as a "prolonged attempt at negotiation," the man left the house and took his own life. The post reported the assault victim suffered minor injuries and there were no other injuries.

Buchanan and Niles police assisted at the scene as did the Berrien County Sheriff's Department.

Possible hung jury in Pittao trial

Updated: 2/4/2008 1:13:22 PM

By ANN ZANIEWSKI
Of The Oakland Press

Jurors deliberating the fate of Daniel Pittao told the judge in a note Monday that they do not believe that they'll be able to reach a unanimous decision. Oakland Circuit Judge Michael Warren instructed the jury to continue deliberating.

Pittao, 48, is charged with killing his estranged wife Tamara Pittao in 1997. A police officer found the 30-year-old woman's body on Thanksgiving morning in her Novi apartment.

Jurors began deliberating Monday, Jan. 28, and continued Tuesday, Thursday Friday and today.



Don't ban life terms for youth

EDITORIALS

There's a four-bill package pending before the state House Judiciary Committee that would forbid lifewithout-parole sentences for juveniles under age 18.

The bills should stay there.

We agree with Oakland County Prosecutor Dave Gorcyca and others throughout the state who say that banning these life sentences would be unfair to victims.

Gorcyca recently noted that all of the 83 county prosecutors in Michigan studied juvenile life-without-parole cases and all felt they would not be comfortable commuting or paroling the juvenile offenders.

Nobody wants to see young men or women waste their lives in prison.

But the 340 juveniles serving life without parole are there after serious and undoubtedly long review and examination of their cases.

The House Fiscal Agency estimates it costs between \$1.6 million and \$2 million to keep a person age 17 and under in prison for life. Obviously, some legislators see the ban on juvenile life sentences as saving some money.

But there are better ways to trim an admittedly bloated Corrections Department budget.

Also, the governor still can commute or pardon the juveniles if it's determined the sentence was not appropriate.

So why ban the life sentences and water down our justice system?

We need to be fair to the victims and society, as well as the criminals.

We oppose passage of these bills.

War stories should be told, heard Thanks to the efforts of the Southfield Veterans Commission and U.S. Rep. Sander Levin's office, Michigan residents who have stories from World War I to the present conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan can have their tales recorded and sent to the Library of Congress.

Each Wednesday at the Southfield Public Library, the commission's chairman, Daniel Brightwell, interviews those who come to tell their wartime histories, using guidelines from the Library of Congress.

This is a great idea.

The commission has recorded nine histories since December. Members originally had a goal of 50 in six months, but Brightwell believes they'll pass that number and keep going.

Such firsthand accounts of war are a win-win situation for all.

The eyewitness accounts help document history, particularly from veterans who won't be around 50 or 75 years from now.

The accounts also help veterans deal with incidents they encountered during the wars that may still affect them psychologically. Such catharsis has to be healthful for them.

The only drawback to the program is that, so far, Southfield is the only location in Michigan where interviews are being conducted.

We urge that other locations be established to make it as convenient as possible for all state and area veterans to have a chance to tell their war stories.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/020208/opi_20080202273.shtml

The County Press

Swindled

by SUSAN YOUNGER
staff reporter

ATTICA TWP—A local mother and her son survived with the charity of soup kitchens and spent nights in a cold house with no power.

Yet Tonya Field and Robert Field weren't destitute. They suspect their court-appointed guardian Shannon Marie Pitcher stole up to \$32,000 of their money.

"She was the one that was supposed to watch over us and help us," said Robert Field, 17. "We went without food, and she wouldn't return our calls. She was supposed to pay for our lights and heat and she didn't. We received notices that our light and heat bills weren't paid all the time. They shut them off three times."

This is not the first time Pitcher, 36, has been accused of stealing from vulnerable adults she was supposed to protect. She is currently imprisoned in the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth Township. The attorney was sentenced in November to spend 23 months to 10 years in prison for mishandling the accounts of adults in Genesee County. Officials there determined that Pitcher stole \$288,137.

Pitcher's Lapeer County clients needed help. Tonya's mother, who is now deceased, set up a trust for the two so they'd never have to worry about a place to live.

"It takes care of the house and the repairs," said Robert. "Shannon couldn't mess with that."

Tonya, who is disabled, used her Social Security income for the day-to-day living expenses. It was determined by Lapeer Community Mental Health that Tonya needed help managing her income, said Robert.

Pitcher, a Flint-based attorney, was appointed.

"They said my mom needed a guardian," said Robert. "My mom was receiving \$1,000 a month and for a while I was getting \$100."

The two said at first they received small amounts of money from Pitcher, then the flow stopped. She stopped paying the bills.

"We'd call her and she wouldn't return our calls," said Tonya. "No one would listen to us. We had no money to eat. It makes you feel terrible. I needed to take care of my son."

Robert finally visited Pitcher's office in Flint, but their situation didn't change.

"She had open checkbooks everywhere," he said. "I thought what kind of person just has open checkbooks sitting around when people come in and out of her office."

Tonya said she applied for about \$31,000 in Social Security money that was owned to her father.

"I never got it," she said. "I found out later that they sent it to Shannon Pitcher."

Publicity about the Genesee County cases spurred Robert and Tonya to report their suspicions to the Michigan State Police.

"I am doing the investigation," said D/Sgt. Mark Reaves. "Allegations are that Shannon Pitcher embezzled almost \$32,000 from her client in Attica Township. I checked with the state and they sent the Social Security money to the person listed as payee. That person was Shannon Pitcher."

Pitcher has said she mixed her clients funds together into one account, said Reaves.

"I don't think she's allowed to do that," said Reaves, adding that he's been in contact with the Genesee County Prosecutor's Office. "I hope to receive information about her seized bank accounts. My intent is to get their money back."

A relative has now been appointed as guardian to Tonya.

"But the bills were let go so long, they're out of control," said Robert. "My mom is in a credit card mess, and the Consumer's Energy bill is so high, she will never be out of debt."

Susan Younger may be reached at (810) 664-0811, Ext. 8122 or susan.younger@lapeergroup.com

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Published February 4, 2008



(Photo by ROD SANFORD/Lansing State Journal)

Staying active: CATA Spectran driver Jennifer Haltom helps secure Jacqui Day's wheelchair Thursday after Day attended a conference of various advocacy groups for disability rights. Day relies on the services of the MI Choice program to enable her to live at home and to volunteer.

By the numbers

\$140
average daily cost for a nursing home

343
people on the waiting list for the MI choice program in Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties

\$40
average daily cost for MI Choice

Boomer bash

- United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan will host its fourth annual Baby Boomer Bash from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday at the Cadillac Club, 1115 S. Washington Ave., Lansing.
- Dance to music by the Sea Cruisers, who will be playing classics from the '50s, '60s and '70s. Light refreshments will be served. Cash bar, valet parking available.
- Tickets are \$30 at the Cadillac Club or by calling 203-1200.

On the Web

- Learn more about the MI Choice program at www.michigan.gov/mdch, then type "Mi Choice" in the search box.
- Learn more about Home Help at

www.mihomework.org/about-home-help/.

- Learn more about United Cerebral Palsy at www.ucp.org/ucp_local.cfm/87.

Making the choice: Advocates say home help program needs to expand

Kathleen Lavey • Lansing State Journal

Without help, Jacqui Day wouldn't be able to leave her home.

Literally.

The Lansing woman has several chronic illnesses. She breathes with the help of an oxygen tank and gets around in a motorized wheelchair.

"I can't get out my front door without having somebody holding the door open so I can drive my chair through," Day said.

Day, 58, a volunteer and advocate for people with disabilities, is able to live at home, thanks to the MI Choice program. It funnels Medicaid dollars that might otherwise be used for more expensive nursing home care to pay for home health aides and other services for senior citizens and people with disabilities.

The program has a budget of \$123.8 million, a waiting list that tops 3,500 statewide and numbers nearly 350 in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties.

That is reason enough to lobby for the program's expansion, said Linda Potter, executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan. The organization advocates for about 35,000 people with cerebral palsy in the state.

"Most people would rather be in their homes or in a home-like setting," Potter said. "It allows people more independence. It's mainly choice and quality of care, and control over your care."

The Department of Community Health is studying the feasibility of expanding the MI Choice program, said James McCurtis, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"The thing about expansion is that it's going to take more dollars, obviously," McCurtis said. "It's a budgetary issue. We have to ask: 'Is it feasible?' and 'Is it affordable?'"

"It's just one of those things where we have to hope for the best in terms of the economy."

Those who use the MI Choice program are allowed to hire people to help them with a variety of tasks, including counseling, private duty nursing, adult day care, homemaking and personal care.

MI Choice dollars also can be used to modify a home or pay for transportation, personal emergency response systems and training in independent living skills.

MI Choice is one of two state programs that provide home help to senior citizens and people with disabilities. The other is the Home Help program, administered through the Department of Human Services. It has stricter income limits than the MI Choice program.

People who use either program sometimes have a hard time finding home care aides, Potter said.

"The pay is low, and it's hard work, too," she said. "If people find something that is a little easier and pays a little more, they leave."

Day's aides work 45 hours per week. They do everything from bathing her and brushing her hair to getting her out that front door. They work on a flexible schedule that accommodates her needs.

For example, one day last week Day didn't have an aide. On Thursday, one came at 5 a.m. to help her get ready to be out the door at 8 a.m. for a conference.

The aides work around Day's busy volunteer schedule. She's affiliated with the Capital Area Center for Independent Living, the Capital Area Health Alliance and the Ingham County Board of Health, among others.

"I regard my aides as my partners," she said. "Yes, I might be an employer, but I still feel like they partner with me in daily activities. And that gives me function, and that gives me a better quality of life because of the choices that I get to have."

Contact Kathleen Lavey at 377-1251 or klavey@lsj.com.

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Low-income heating help available

Monday, February 04, 2008

By Chris Gautz

cgautz@citpat.com -- 768-4926

For some, as temperatures drop outside, each turn of the thermostat brings to mind next month's bill, rather than needed warmth.

Those most in need may qualify for some relief, in the form of a home heating credit.

The credit is for low-income families and can be applied to all heating costs, including propane and purchased firewood.

Consumers Energy Spokesman Jeff Holyfield said the utility encourages people to apply for the credit.

"It's meaningful assistance," he said.

Credits are determined based on income and the amount spent on heating.

The average credit was worth \$202 in 2006. The average Consumers heating bill last winter was \$150 a month.

In 2006, 103,000 Consumers customers received the credit, and 404,136 received it statewide.

That number is expected to increase this year, and that is a good thing, said Debra Harmon, Consumers Energy's corporate customer assistance advocacy manager.

"The sad thing is, there are a lot more people that qualify than apply," she said.

Harmon, recently back from a lobbying trip in Washington, said the Michigan Congressional delegation has always been supportive of the Low Income Heating Assistance Program, which funds the credit.

This year, \$62.9 million was allocated for Michigan's home heating credits.

Harmon encourages customers to apply early. The deadline to apply is Sept. 30.

"The sooner the better," Harmon said.

Once the application is completed, it takes about four to six weeks for the credit to be processed. In most cases it is forwarded directly to the utility and shows up as a credit on a customer's bill.

People who live in apartments can also apply for the credit, and they will receive a check to apply toward their rent.

For those who have received the credit in the past, they will receive a note in this month's bill notifying them of how to apply again.

Walk for Warmth hits the sidewalk Feb. 23



[Michelle Graves](#) / Reporter

Last updated: Tuesday, January 29th, 2008 03:26:56 PM

GLADWIN COUNTY — With the cold weather and the price of gas hitting consumers in the pocketbook this winter, many families are looking for some extra help to make it through the season.

To help raise money to help these residents out, the Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is sponsoring its 17th Annual Walk for Warmth fundraising event Saturday, Feb. 23 in six counties.

Walk for Warmth is MMCAA's main event to raise the money to assist needy households with rising heating costs. Walk for Warmth funding allows MMCAA to help those who do not qualify for any other programs. All proceeds raised in Gladwin County stay in Gladwin County.

"We are hoping for a record turn out, as the need is greater than it has ever been," said Deb Schafer, Regional Outreach Coordinator for Mid Michigan Community Action Agency in Clare and Gladwin Counties and Regional Coordinator for Walk for Warmth in Clare and Gladwin Counties.

Schafer said MMCAA has more new clients everyday.

"These are families who have never needed help and are not happy about having to ask for it at all," she said. "The majority of people we are working with have either lost their jobs or are working several part-time jobs to try and make ends meet."

She added that there are some clients who work as many as four part-time jobs while trying to juggle families and other responsibilities at the same time.

"I have been in the human services field for several years and have never seen so much need. I only wish that we had more funding to help," said Schafer.

Schafer described the Walk as a way for the community to help its neighbors and know that there is help out there if needed.

Money is raised by walkers who find people to sponsor them in the Walk. In addition, a recent fundraiser dinner at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Gladwin yielded about \$3,000 which will go toward the Walk for Warmth goal.

"Judy Grant and Leo Fitzpatrick put together the whole dinner with the help of the K of C," said Schafer. "They did an excellent job."

In 2007, MMCAA's Walk for Warmth raised \$86,500 to help those in need of heating assistance; Gladwin County raised more money last year than any of the other six counties that participated with \$23,656.99. Over 600 mid Michigan households were assisted in 2007.

This year's goal is \$98,000; Gladwin County's goal is \$19,000.

The Walk occurs state-wide, with Mid Michigan Community Action Agency sponsoring it in Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola Counties.

Gladwin County's Walk for Warmth lasts between 20 and 30 minutes. Registration is at 9 a.m., and the Walk begins at 10 a.m. Participants walk from St. Paul's Episcopal Church to Hungry Howies and back.

There will be prizes and give aways for people, such as the youngest walker and the oldest walker, said Schafer.

Walk for Warmth is sponsored by Consumers Energy, Blue Flame Propane, Martin Heating & Cooling, County Wide Septic Tank Cleaning, Stanford, ProGas Propane, Wooden Shoe Big Boys Club, Robbin Harsh Excavating, Stanley Fuel Gas & Oil Co., Auto Repair Radiator of Midland, Chemical Bank, DTE Energy, Brad Maley Well Drilling, White Pines and 3 Dimension Construction, LLC.

Sponsors pay to help MMCAA with Walk for Warmth advertising.

“In turn, their name is put on shirts, brochures and posters,” said Schafer. “They’re getting advertisement in six counties, so in turn it pays for our ads.”

Anyone who would like to participate in Walk for Warmth can pick up pledge sheets at any MMCAA location. Gladwin County’s office is located at 1302 Chatterton St.; call 989-426-2801 with any questions. Clare County’s office is located at 166 E. Main St. in Harrison; call 989-539-4157 with questions.

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Detroit News

February 2, 2008

Permanently restrain union payroll abuse

State Attorney General Mike Cox has won a restraining order stopping the Michigan Civil Service Commission from moving ahead with plans to allow state government to route deductions from state workers to union political action committees. Even though the unions say they will reimburse the cost of the payroll deductions, it is an abuse of government power to grant one interest group special access to the finances of public employees. The temporary restraining order should turn into a permanent injunction.

Lansing State Journal

February 2, 2008

Join opposition

A letter writer (Jan. 24) stated I am the only loud voice against the construction of the Michigan State Police headquarters triangle project.

Rep. Paul Opsommer, R-Dewitt, Rep. Mark Meadows, D-East Lansing, Rep. Richard Ball, R-Laingsburg, and Rep. Mike Nofs, R-Battle Creek, also have been strong voices against this misuse of taxpayers' dollars.

The aforementioned letter mentions specifically the 93rd House District. Paul Opsommer has been a champion for the taxpayer and is fighting ridiculous expenditures.

The MSP headquarters has become known as "Michigan's Bridge to Nowhere." It is being built at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

The contract says that the lease can end at any time if the Legislature does not appropriate the money for the lease. If you, too, think this project is a misuse of your taxes, contact the governor, your senator and your representative.

State Rep. Rick Jones
Grand Ledge